Carter Set to Strengthen Review of Clandestine CIA Activities

By Jim Klurfeld
Newsday

President Carter is preparing to issue an executive order that would substantially strengthen the Attorney General's power to review the legality of clandestine Central Intelligence Agency activities, according to high-ranking administration and congressional officials.

The order is part of a major administration effort to reorganize the intelligence community and avoid the abuses of the past.

Administration officials said the order would put the Attorney General in a position to block an intelligence activity he believed violated the rights of American citizens, subject only to a final decision by the President. The Attorney General already has direct authority over the FBI.

The officials said that the executive order, which could be issued as early as the end of next week, would represent a further tightening of the rules and regulations issued last year by President Ford as a means of curbing CIA abuses.

"It is an evolutionary, not a revolutionary, step," one official said. "But we believe it represents a significant advance over 11905," the Ford executive order.

Currently the Attorney General is consulted on CIA intelligence activities and makes recommendations on specific projects. But one White House official said Wednesday night that under the Carter order the Attorney General "will establish the framework" under which these activities can take place. "He will set the standards. It will make him a co-equal of other members of the intelligence community."

In addition to strengthening the Attorney General's role, the executive order would list more specifically rules under which the intelligence community must operate, including regulations on warrantless wiretaps, searches and mail-openings. The President also is expected to submit charter guidelines for FBI intelligence activity as well as for other agencies in the intelligence community, including the National Security Administration and Defense Intelligence Agency.

A just-released General Accounting Office study criticized the lack of a charter for the FBI and recommended one to outline the agency's role in domestic intelligence-gathering.

Sen. Walter D. Huddleston (D-Ky.), head of the Senate Intelligence subcommittee on charters and guidelines, said he viewed increased authority of the Attorney General as the key step. Huddleston noted that his panel is continuing to work on a set of guidelines in the same area.

"How much the Congress does really depends on how far we think the President is going," he said. "We believe the Attorney General should have a very strong role in reviewing the legality of proposed CIA operations." If the President's proposals do not go far enough, he said, "then we will certainly go ahead with our plans."

Huddleston said that because an executive order can always be changed by the President, "we feel there is a need for rules and regulations governing the conduct of the intelligence community passed by the Congress of the United States." Huddleston noted that his panel would be ready to begin hearings on congressional proposals by the first of the year.

Carter announced last summer aspects of the reorganization of the intelligence community that now are to be formalized under charters. To members of the intelligence communities the reorganization as formalized in the charter is the major aspect of the President's plan.

The basic change was to increase the power of the CIA director, Adm. Stansfield Turner. In addition to heading the CIA itself, Turner will make budget decisions for all the intelligence agencies and also determine which agencies will do which jobs.

Carter's top national security advisers have criticized the type and the quality of intelligence information they have received. One purpose of the reorganization will be to have Turner coordinate the desires of the decision-makers with the capabilities of the intelligence agencies.